

\$5.00

MIDDLE TN STATE UNIV.



3 3082 01501326 0

# Ford County Historical Society

Publication No. 35




Uncle Dave Macon

1995

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

976  
.857  
R931p  
v. 35



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://www.archive.org/details/publication35ruth>

976  
.857  
R937  
V. 35

RUTHERFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PUBLICATION NO. 35

Published

by

the

Rutherford County Historical Society

O F F I C E R S

President .....Charles L. Nored

Vice President .....Kirk McCrary

Recording Secretary .....Ed DeBoer

Treasurer .....Mary Cox

Directors .....Robert Walden  
Ernie Johns  
William Hall

Publication No. 35 is distributed to members of the Society. The annual membership dues are \$15.00 per family, which includes the two regular publications and the monthly Newsletter to all members. Additional copies of this and other publications may be obtained by writing to the Society. A list of publications available is included in this publication.

All correspondence concerning additional copies, contributions to future issues, and membership should be addressed to:

Rutherford County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 906  
Murfreesboro, TN 37133-0906

MISU Library  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37132



The Rutherford County Historical Society would like to express its appreciation to Dr. Charles Wolfe, Professor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, for writing this publication for the Society. The co-author of ***The Life and Legend of Leadbelly***, Wolfe has also authored ten other books on American music. He has been nominated for three Grammy Awards.

Wolfe received his A.B. degree from Southwest Missouri State College and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Kansas.



The following publications are for sale by:

THE RUTHERFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 906  
Murfreesboro, TN 37133-0906

(All publications are \$5.00 + \$2.00 postage and handling)

- Publication 1: Rutherford County Marriage Records, (1851-1853), Bride Index, Rutherford County Militia Commissions 1807-1811, Rutherford County Offices and Officers (1804-1973), and Union: Murfreesboro's Other University.
- Publication 2: Rutherford County Marriage Records, (1854-1856), Bride Index (continued), Rutherford County Militia Commissions 1812-1820, Mayors of Murfreesboro, and a History of the Kittrell Community.
- Publication 3: Rutherford County Marriage Records (1857-1860), Bride Index, Griffith Rutherford, 1803 Census of Rutherford County, and Rutherford County Militia Records.
- Publication 4: History of Readyville, Artists Depict Battle of Stones River, and Census of 1810 and List of Taxpayers not in Census.
- Publication 5: The Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad (1845-1872), Rutherford County Post Offices and Postmasters, and the Rutherford Rifles.
- Publication 6: A History of the Link Community, History of Lavergne, Fellowship Church and Community, and The Sanders Family.
- Publication 7: Hopewell Church, Petition by Cornelius Sanders for Revolutionary War Pension.
- Publication 8: History of Bethel-Leanna Community, the Crowders of Readyville, A view of the Battlefield of Stones River from New York Times (Sept. 2, 1865), Record of Jordan Williford, Revolutionary War Soldier from Records in U.S. Pension Office, Company Roll of Major Hardy Murfree (Sept. 9, 1778 from the National Archives).
- Publication 9: History of Dilton Community.
- Publication 10: 1864 Diary, Peter Jennings, Henderson Yoakum, Early Methodist Church, and Overall.





- Publication 11: State Capitol, Ben McCullough, Petition of Michael Lorange, Country Store, and Soule College.
- Publication 12: History of Smyrna, Sewart Air Force Base, Goochland, Index of Some Actual Wills of Rutherford County, 1802-1882.
- Publication 13: Tennessee College, Coleman Scouts, New Monuments in Old City Cemetery, and James Bole's Revolutionary War Pension.
- Publication 14: Murfreesboro Presbyterian Church, Kirks and Montgomerys, Russell Home, John Lytle's and John M. Leak's Revolutionary War Pension.
- Publication 15: John W. Childress Home (1847), Whigs in Rutherford County (1835-1845).
- Publication 16: Hart, Childress, Miles, Fosterville, Cherry Shade, William Cocke.
- Publication 17: Jefferson 1803-1813, Will Abstracts (1803-1814), Old City Cemetery.
- Publication 18: Railroad Stations in Rutherford County, Rion Family, Stones River.
- Publication 19: Footprints ... at Smyrna, V.A. Medical Center, Manson Family, Jenkin's Homes, Will Abstracts (Record Books 3 & 4), Rutherford County Historical Society, Early News, Sketch from Macon County, Illinois, 1981 in Rutherford County.
- Publication 20: Roads and Turnpikes of Rutherford County, includes many Rutherford County names.
- Publication 21: Jefferson Springs Resort, Lascassas Baptist Church, John Price Buchanan, Will Abstracts, 1836 Tax Records of the 25th District.
- Publication 22: Ft. Rosecrans, Big Springs, East Main Church of Christ, Tax Records District 23 & 24 for 1836, 1837, and 1849, Mathias Hoover.
- Publication 23: Harding House, Milton, County Stores in the Jefferson Area, Will Abstracts Book 7, Tax Record of Districts 15 and 16 (1836, 1837, and 1849).
- Publication 24: History of Medicine in Rutherford County.



- Publication 25: Legends and Stories of the Civil War in Rutherford County.
- Publication 26: A Yankee in Rutherford County, Literary Interest Expressed by Women in Rutherford County, Mt. Olivet and Hoovers Gap Methodists, My Years at Linebaugh Library.
- Publication 27: History of Central Christian Church, Alfred Blackman.
- Publication 28: Coleman Scouts (Henry B. Shaw, Leader; Sam Davis, Dee Jobe, Williams Roberts, William Manford Street, and others.)
- Publication 29: The Churches of Christ in Rutherford County, History of the Salem Methodist Church, and Municipal Officers of the Town of Murfreesboro (1818-1891).
- Publication 30: History of Rutherford County Farm (including insane asylum and the pest control center). Architecture of Rutherford County Farm.
- Publication 31: The Rutherford County Rifles (a group of 150 young men from Rutherford County who volunteered for service in the Confederacy). Includes a list of these men and what happened to them. Article on Violence in Rutherford County.
- Publication 32: A Researcher's Guide to Rutherford County Records by David Rowe; Jerry Sneak by Homer Pittard (discovered after his death).
- Publication 33: Census and Tax Records for First District.
- Publication 34: Mattie Ready-John Hunt Morgan Wedding; Dement Family; Two Gallant Leaders at the Battle of Murfreesboro.



The following publications are also available through the Society:

History of Medicine in Rutherford County, Part II (A collection of Biographies of Physicians Who Practiced in the area during the Nineteenth Century.) Robert G. Ransom, M.D.

\$16.00 + \$2.00 postage

Westbrooks, Williams, and Related Smothermans of Rutherford County.

\$14.50 + \$2.00 postage

Brothers and Others and Fosterville \$21.00 + \$2.00 postage  
(OUT-OF-PRINT)

History of Versailles - OUT OF PRINT

History of Rutherford County by C.C. Sims (pub. 1947)

\$12.00 + \$2.00 postage

History of Rutherford County by Mabel Pittard (pub. 1983)

\$12.50 + \$2.00 postage

A History of Rutherford County Schools, Vol. I (Northern section of the County)

\$12.00 + \$2.00 postage

A History of Rutherford County Schools, Vol II (Southern section of County, including Murfreesboro)

\$12.00 + \$2.00 postage

1840 Rutherford County Census with Index

\$5.00 + \$2.00 postage

Deed Abstracts of Rutherford County, 1803-1810

\$5.00 + \$2.00 postage

Cemetery Records of Rutherford County:

Vol. I (Northwestern third of County and part of Wilson and Davidson Counties, 256 cemeteries with index and maps)

\$10.00 + \$2.00 postage

Vol. II (Eastern third of County, cemeteries with index and maps)

\$10.00 + \$2.00 postage

Vol. III (Southwestern third of Rutherford County and the western part of Cannon County, 241 cemeteries with index and maps)

\$10.00 + \$2.00 postage



The History of Rutherford County, Vol. I, 1799-1828  
by John C. Spence \$25.00 + \$2.00 postage

The History of Rutherford County, Vol II, 1829-1870  
by John C. Spence \$25.00 + \$2.00 postage

A Civil War Diary by John C. Spence \$25.00 + \$2.00 postage

The Pictorial History of Rutherford County by Mabel Pittard  
OUT OF PRINT

Map of 1878 Rutherford County (shows land owners)  
\$3.50 + \$2.00 postage

Available from Mrs. R.A. Ragland, P.O. Box 544, Murfreesboro,  
TN 37133-0544

Marriage Records of Rutherford County  
\$10.00 + \$2.00 postage





## UNCLE DAVE MACON

by

Charles Wolfe

There was in those days a big old two-story house out on the Woodbury Pike near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in the dusty little community called Kittrell. Everybody knew who lived there -- it was hard not to. Across the top of the long front porch was a sign that said UNCLE DAVE MACON, and to the right was a big wooden picture of a genial older man holding a banjo and grinning a big gold-tooth smile. "I want people to be able to find me in case they want me to come and play for them," the owner of the house explained to the curious.

Back in the 1930's, people were having little trouble finding Uncle Dave Macon. Churches came to him to see if he would help them raise money; auctioneers came to him to get him to play for country sales to attract bidders; vaudeville bookers came with offers to play tours that ranged from Boston to Florida; schoolhouse superintendents came to him asking for a show to help buy books in Depression-racked rural districts. Even the bank of nearby Woodbury came to him when they finished building the new bank and had to transfer all the money from the old one: could they hire Uncle Dave to sit on top of the wagon with the money chests and play his banjo during the move? Surely no desperado would dare try to rob a wagon that had Uncle Dave Macon sitting on top of it.



People all over middle Tennessee knew David Harrison Macon and were used to seeing him at local schools and on the little courthouse squares. He was the one with the chin whiskers, the red suspenders, the gold watch and chain, and what Judge Hay at the Grand Ole Opry called "that million dollar Tennessee smile." He was the one with the hat that bore the hat band slogan OLD BUT REGULAR, that twirled his banjo like it was a baton and fanned it with his hat, and that refused to drive a car because they weren't as dependable as mules. But he was also the one that was heard every Saturday night on the Grand Ole Opry, and that was featured on dozens of Victrola records put out by Vocalion, Brunswick, RCA, Okeh, Champion, and Montgomery Ward. He was the one who was country's first real superstar, winning a national reputation years before Jimmie Rodgers or The Carter Family ever stepped into a studio. For years he was the most popular single performer on the Opry, a grand old man whose humor and personality won him fans everywhere. He was the first artist to make style a part of country music. As one of his fans said, "He may not have been the best banjo player or the best singer, but he sure as heck was the best something!"

David Harrison Macon had roots running deep into Tennessee history. He was born October 7, 1870, in the community of Smartt Station in Warren County; in Uncle Dave's own words, "I was born near the beautiful mountain town of McMinnville." His father was Captain John Macon, born in Warrenton, North Carolina, in



1829, and a Civil War veteran. His mother was Martha Ann Ramsey, a native of Viola in Warren County, born in 1838. The 1870 census for the 9th Civil District shows David Harrison was the ninth child born to the family. The oldest was a daughter Lou (born 1856), followed by Vanderbilt (b. 1857), Betty (b. 1858), Samuel (b. 1860), George (b. ca. 1862), John (b. 1863), and Sallie C. (b. ca. 1867). After David Harrison would come two younger children, Bob (b. 1875) and Pearl (b. ca. 1879). Some of these siblings -- especially Lou and Bob -- would play important roles in Uncle Dave's later career.

Captain John Macon was a well-known and popular figure in Warren County. His own father was a Henry Harrison Macon, who in turn was descended from a Revolutionary War hero, Colonel John Macon, and from his uncle, Nathaniel Macon, a North Carolina Congressman and one-time Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Sometime prior to 1830 Henry Harrison Macon settled in Warren County, on Hickory Creek, on a plot of some 600 acres. Before his death in 1851, Henry Harrison Macon expanded his holdings by over 2,000 more acres, and had established a distillery, as well as a saw mill, grist mill, and cotton gin. By 1850, the year before Henry Harrison died, his son John shows up in the census records as a student at Irving College, one of 55 students in that local institution. By the time of his father's death, John found himself inheriting a considerable amount of business and property. Most of these he administered with his younger brother, Joseph K.



The Macon family Bible indicates that John married Martha Ann Ramsey on December 2, 1855, in Warren County. The young couple soon built a handsome house in McMinnville, and the Macon Brothers soon bought a grocery store, a tin shop, and a mercantile business downtown. All this, as well as John and Martha's growing family, was interrupted in 1861, with the outbreak of the War Between the States. Both Macon brothers closed their stores and joined the 35th Tennessee Infantry Regiment, sometimes called the First Tennessee Mountain Rifle Regiment, commanded by Colonel Benjamin J. Hill. John Macon helped to organize the 2nd Company D; it along with some nine others was mustered in at Camp Smartt, near McMinnville, on September 6 and 7.

During the early days of the war, the regiment moved from Trousdale County to Bowling Green and finally to Shiloh, where they joined in one of the bloodiest battles of the conflict. Here the brigade the 35th was in suffered over 1,000 killed or wounded -- over a third of its roster. Reorganized, the regiment fought in the northern Mississippi campaign, as well as at Perryville and at the Battle of Murfreesboro. The exact fate of "Captain Macon's company" during the balance of the war is not clear; his regiment was reorganized and merged with others throughout the conflict, until their eventual dismissal at Greensboro, NC, on May 1, 1865. Nor are there any clear records to indicate exactly when Captain John returned home; he bought out his brother's share in the family businesses in 1862, and there is a record of the marriage of Joseph in 1865. We do know









that by 1867 Captain John had reopened his store with a new partner.

The world young David Macon was born into in 1870 was the grim world of the Reconstruction South. In Warren County, crops lay fallow, buildings were in disrepair, and money was in short supply. Still, two generations of Macon prosperity gave the family at least some sort of cushion, and the year young David was born, his father was still relatively prosperous. The census records gave his real estate value that year as \$2000, his "personal value" estimated at \$4000 -- over six times the average per capita income in the state at that time. The Macon household also included three live-in employees, two housekeepers and a "male farm laborer." Though the Macon family was large, it was well provided for; young David was soon attending school in town, and listening to some of the folk music from the region. His sister Lou was an accomplished pianist, and often bought the latest sheet music to try out in the family parlor. Through her, David picked up rudiments of singing and a knowledge of songs.

The young boy was soon playing the guitar -- he had not been introduced to the banjo yet -- and picking up songs. Many years later, when he was asked if he remembered the first song he learned, he smiled, nodded, and proceeded to sing it. It was a comic piece called "Greenback."

If I had a scoldin' wife, I tell you what I'd do,  
Run my finger down her throat, gag her with my  
thumb,



Hi yo, that greenback, greenback, hi yo today,  
 Hi yo, that greenback, they're done courtin' me.  
 Once I had a brand new overcoat and I hung it on

the wall,

Someone stole the overcoat, and whoa, mule, whoa!  
 Hi yo, that greenback, greenback, hi yo today,  
 Hi yo, that greenback, they're done courtin' me.

You may ride the old grey horse, I will ride the roan,  
 You may court your own true love, leave my wife alone.  
 Hi yo, that greenback, greenback, hi yo today,  
 Hi yo, that greenback, they're done courtin' me.

During Reconstruction, of course, one of the bones of contention between southerners and the national government was the issue of paper money, or "greenbacks." There was even an independent "Greenback Party" which ran on the platform in 1876 that paper money should be the only currency.

In the meantime, things were not going well for Captain John. The so-called Panic of 1873 delayed what recovery was underway in the region, and by 1877 he was starting to sell off some of the Macon property. By early 1884 he had decided that times were so hard up country that the best chance for him and his young family would be to do what many of his friends were doing: head for the cities. In December 1883 he sold his house in McMinnville, along with the original 600 acre tract that Henry Harrison Macon had originally settled 40 years before. In early 1884 he packed up his family -- at least those that were



still living at home -- and started down off the Cumberland rim down to Nashville, 60 miles to the west. With them came the two youngest children, Bob and Pearl, as well as 13-year-old David, young Martha, young John, Samuel, and Eugene. By this time Lou and Bettie had each found husbands.

Captain John and Martha had decided to enter the hotel business, and settled in at the Broadway House hotel, at 166 Broadway in Nashville -- near the current site of the Hard Rock Cafe. For reasons unclear, the hotel was in Martha's name (M.A. Macon and Company), though Captain John was a very visible part of the scene. In the 1880's Nashville had a rich vaudeville and theater scene, and many of the touring performers liked to stay at the Broadway House. One reason was that the building had a large, open basement where the acts -- which ranged from jugglers to animal acts -- could rehearse. Young David, who after school began to clerk at the hotel, was fascinated with the old vaudeville style and spirit of the performers, and watched with great attention as they rehearsed not only their music and songs, but their jokes, their slapstick tricks, and their comedy lines. It was an age of showmanship, when how well a performer sold himself to an audience could make or break his act. Style became more important than substance -- a lesson young David Macon was learning well.

The 13-year-old boy was also fascinated with his schoolwork. Many years later he would write that he "attended the old Hume Fogg high school in the city." He continued:





It was in this first school in that city that my beloved teacher Miss Julia Burton aroused in me an ambition to be neat, to learn my lessons well, and above all be careful with my writing. And though to this day I am past 62 years old I never write a letter but what her dear face filled with tender instructions comes up before me urging me to do my best. I do not know if she is still living or has seen How Beautiful Heaven Must Be. But let that be as it is, I'm hoping to meet her some sweet day and thank her face to face for her good influences that have followed me through life.

Throughout his life, Uncle Dave's penmanship was graceful and distinctive, and his letters have a 19th century charm and formality that impressed almost everyone who got them.

In the fall of 1885 a circus pitched camp in downtown Nashville, in an open field that was then at the corner of 8th and Broadway. Run by a man named Sam McFlinn, it featured, among other acts, the comedy and banjo playing of Joel Davidson. Davidson was apparently a native of Davidson County, and the Nashville city directories for 1884 and 1886 list him as a "comedian" who lived at the corner of Lee Avenue and High Street. Little other information has been discovered about Davidson, but Uncle Dave recalled that at the time he was "noted" as a banjoist and comedian. Whatever the case, Davidson



became the single most important influence on young Dave. It was he, Macon wrote, "who proved to be the spirit that touched the mainspring of the talent that inspired Uncle Dave to make his wishes known to his dear old mother and she gave him the money to purchase his first banjo." (A famous photo of the young man proudly holding this banjo has often been published in various stories about Macon and was used by the artist himself in one of his own songbooks.) We do not know if Macon knew Davidson personally, or just watched him on stage; one of his later trick banjo-twirling numbers called "Uncle Dave Handles a Banjo Like an Elephant Handles a Peanut" apparently came from Davidson.

By 1886, the year he turned sixteen, David Harrison was working part time as a clerk at the Broadway House. Living there with him were his parents, John and Martha, as well as his younger brother Bob, and his older brothers John and Samuel. Another brother, Eugene L., operated a livery stable up on Market Street. John and Samuel also operated a distillery (and were officially described as "cider and vinegar manufacturers") on south Front Street -- a detail that would play a key role in the events that would soon occur. That fall would see one of the most colorful and bitter political campaigns in Tennessee history, the "War of the Roses" between the fiddling Taylor Brothers, Alf and Bob. But for the Macon family, the stage was being set for a much more personal and dramatic tragedy.

Late in the afternoon of October 14, 1886, the Macon family was lounging around the door to the Broadway House when a man



passed by that all of them instantly recognized. He was one J.C. Fowler, a former resident of Warren County who was also a United States Internal Revenue Deputy Collector. For some fifteen years, bad blood had existed between Captain John and Fowler; back in Warren County, Fowler had been responsible for inspecting the distillery that Captain John ran, and he had written him up for numerous violations. Captain John argued that these were trumped-up charges, and that Fowler had a vendetta against him and his family. Apparently Fowler's superiors agreed, for they had reassigned all inspections of the Macon distillery to other agents. Now both Fowler and the Macons found themselves working in Nashville, and Fowler was starting to find violations in the distillery run by the Macon sons John and Samuel.

According to later trial testimony, on this evening, as Fowler passed in front of the hotel, one of the brothers made some sarcastic comment to him. Words followed; Captain John overheard from his position as desk clerk and joined the argument. One thing led to another, and soon he and Fowler were scuffling on the sidewalk. Fowler had in his hand a penknife he was whittling with, and he abruptly stabbed Captain John under the forearm. At first, the cut appeared to be superficial, and the son took Captain John to the hospital. Once there, though, they soon found that the knife had cut a major artery, and that Captain John was losing blood fast. Shock set in, and the next morning, Captain John Macon, late of the Confederacy, aged 57, was dead.



The Macon boys were horrified, and swore to bring Fowler to justice. Several, including young David Harrison, had actually witnessed the attack, and were more than willing to testify. On October 19, the Grand Jury indicted Fowler for murder, and plans were set for the trial. Fowler, who apparently was well off, got three attorneys to defend him, and succeeded in getting a series of continuances through the fall of 1886 and into the spring of 1887. Apparently the defense thought the Macons would eventually tire of waiting and move out of Nashville, but they stubbornly hung on, with Martha continuing to run the Broadway House, Sam and John to run their cider and vinegar company, and Eugene La Vanderbilt to run his livery stable.

Finally, on May 24, 1887, the trial started. It lasted three days, and dwelt extensively on the bad blood between Macon and Fowler. There was also testimony about the wound Captain John suffered, and how it would not normally have been fatal, but due to the Captain's "advanced years" and "feeble health," the loss of blood was fatal. On the 28th of May, with the Macon clan watching in the courtroom, the jury came back with a decision of not guilty.

It was a bitter blow to the Macons, but especially to Martha. Within weeks she had decided to leave Nashville and return to the countryside. She chose not to return to Warren County, but to go to Readyville, about halfway between Murfreesboro and McMinnville. There she took the proceeds from the Broadway House and bought the old Ready Home ("The Corners"), a big three-story structure that literally stood on





the county line dividing Rutherford and Cannon Counties. In recent years, the house had been used as a stopover for the local stagecoach line, as well as an inn, and Mrs. Macon planned on continuing to use it that way. In a sense, she was trading one hotel for another.

Mrs. Macon moved to Readyville in the latter half of 1887, but it is not clear how many of the boys moved with her. The two youngest children, Bob and Pearl, were only fifteen and thirteen respectively, so they were certainly there, but Dave was seventeen and might have been out on his own for a time. In 1889 we have him living at Hermitage, Tennessee, courting a young woman that he thought somewhat above his station. Sometime after that, and with the courtship abandoned, he did return to Readyville. Here he worked for his mother tending to the horses from arriving stagecoaches. In his spare time, he continued to sing and play the banjo, taking what he had learned from the professional entertainers in the basement of the Broadway House and adding to it the older folk traditions of rural middle Tennessee.

He was especially interested in African-American music in the region. During the late 1800's, there was a considerable black population in the rural counties to the west and south of Nashville; many former slaves had come up to the area from Mississippi after Emancipation, and some parts of the area showed as much as 25% black residence in the 1910 census. Though black folk music would later be associated with spirituals and blues, the older forms of it featured fiddle and



banjo music, and young Dave Macon was fascinated with the odd tunings and different picking styles he saw local blacks using. One of his close friends was a black man named Tom Davis, who worked for years at the Readyville mill, and who supposedly taught him what would become one of his most famous songs, "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy."

By the 1890's young Dave had hit upon the idea of entertaining the passengers arriving by stagecoach, and he constructed a little platform on top of a barn where he could do impromptu shows. Though he received nothing but an occasional tip and some polite applause, he found he enjoyed making music -- though he had no real hope to ever be able to do it for a living. His marketable skill seemed to be with horse and mule teams -- "he was a mule man," recalled his son Archie. He was learning how to care for, drive, and harness up teams, and he had little doubt that his future lay in the farmland of middle Tennessee.



## II

By 1899 David Macon had grown into a handsome young man with the dark, brooding Macon eyes and a neat Van Dyke beard, fond of dressing well, not a bit shy about meeting strangers. By now he was some 29 years old, and friends and family were wondering if he was ever going to marry. They were relieved when he met and began courting a girl named Matilda Richardson, a native of nearby Kittrell and seven years David's junior. She was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, Patrick Henry Richardson, and his wife Mary Bowling Richardson. She was not especially musical, and didn't share David's enthusiasm for banjo picking, but she was charmed by the Macon style; when he proposed to her, she accepted. The wedding was held on November 28, 1899, in Kittrell - probably in the nearby Methodist church.

The young couple settled in Kittrell, in a house facing the Woodbury Pike, and began working the sizable tract of land that Matilda received as her dowry. By May 1901 their first child, Archie Emery Jesse Macon, was born. Others followed within a few years: John Henry David Macon (June 1903), Harry Richardson Macon (September 1906), Glenn Samuel Macon (June 1908), Dorris Vanderbilt Macon (July 1910), Esten Gray Macon (February 1913), and Paul Franklin (May 1919). (Uncle Dave would later make jokes to his friends about "He-Kittrell.")

To help feed his growing family, Uncle Dave organized, about 1900, the Macon Midway Mule and Transportation Company.



The plan was to haul freight between Murfreesboro, in Rutherford County, and Woodbury, to the east in Cannon County. This was necessary because Woodbury didn't have a railroad, and the only way to get goods in or out was by wagon. Since the Kittrell farm was about half way between the two towns, it was decided to make that the layover point; one day's drive would be from Murfreesboro to Kittrell, the team and driver would rest there, and the second day's drive would be over the hilly, winding roads into Woodbury. "We hauled everything," recalled his son Archie, who later helped him on the route. "Flour, nails, barbed wire, piece goods, horse shoes, medicine -- anything you can think of. We hauled something that paid good in those days, and still does -- Jack Daniel No. 7. We hauled it to Woodbury for 25 cents a gallon..... that is, what they didn't make at Woodbury!" Uncle Dave soon hired a friend and neighbor, Hatton Sanford, to be general manager for the company, and using what he later called "four good mules and a Mitchell wagon," he got the business into high gear.

But the newly minted teamster couldn't quite keep his interest in music down. As he drove along, people on the route could hear him singing, and whenever any little boy on the road got hold of an old banjo, he would be standing at the side of the road to show it to Uncle Dave. He had picked up dozens of old folk songs from the area -- ones like "Sail Away Ladies" and "Whoa Mule" and "Rabbit in the Pea Patch," and he still remembered some of the favorites he had heard in Nashville, such as the stage song "Over the Mountain" and the old riverboat





roustabout song "Rock About My Saro Jane." But now he was beginning to write his own songs, and to customize some of his old ones. People liked to hear about local topics, and about current events, and about people they knew -- a lesson that he would remember for years. And then, in 1902, Uncle Dave suddenly found himself right smack in the middle of a major news-making event.

On March 28, 1902, the Nashville **Banner** carried two innocent articles about the weather; one described heavy rainfall that had hit Alabama; the other predicted "continued rain" in the middle Tennessee area. That Thursday night, though, and the following Friday, it began raining hard in Rutherford County and middle Tennessee. "The heaviest fall of rain ever known here fell here," said one dispatch to the **Banner**. "Every bridge in the county was washed away and Murfreesboro is cut off from the outside world. The telephone lines in many directions are burned out, and it is therefore impossible to get complete information." Nor was there any work from nearby Woodbury, since the phone lines were out there as well. Throughout the weekend there were attempts made to get word from Woodbury; a wagon driver who tried to cross one of the flooded streams to get to the town was swept away and severely injured. When communication was eventually restored, people learned that an entire "Negro church" was washed away, as well as a number of cabins near Rush Creek.

When the water finally went down, Uncle Dave and Hatton Sanford were among the first to get into Woodbury. Uncle Dave



later remembered: "When we at last reached the city limits of Woodbury, to find the first face to greet us was none other than the old familiar face of Bob Vernon, a noted musician, chimney builder, gardener, and general flunky. Our first question was, 'Well, Bob, how did the flood serve you?' He replied, "Boss, all I've got is gone.'" The phrase and the situation struck Uncle Dave, and he soon had turned it into one of his first original songs: "All I've Got is Gone."

Well, I am going to sing you a brand new song,  
She's a dandy as sure as you are born,  
Everything just running in rhymes,  
Of matters and things concerning these times.

For all I've got is gone, all I've got is gone.

A whole lot of people had acted fools,  
Went along here and bought a lot of mules,  
Cotton was high, but now it is down.  
You can't jump a mule man in your town.

For all I've got is gone, all I've got is gone.

I went to the bank to borrow some money,  
Tell you right now, I didn't find it funny,  
The banker said, 'I have none to loan,  
Get your old hat and pull out home.'



For all we've got is gone, for all we've got is gone.

Uncle Dave would sing this song often at local events and on his Mitchell wagon, and would even record it at his first recording session years later. It would, in a very real sense, become his first "hit."

In November 1906 Uncle Dave's mother, Martha Ramsey, died, leaving her old house in Readyville to her son Vanderbilt. Other changes soon followed. Two of the Macon brothers, Emory John and Bob, had moved to Oklahoma, and it was there that Emory John died in 1908, under somewhat tragic circumstances. He was single, and left most of his estate to his brother Bob; however, a handsome bequest came to Uncle Dave as well, providing even more capital for his farm and freight business.

It was about this time, however, that David Harrison began to suffer from emotional problems that would bother him for the rest of his life. He started having fits of depression, and would go into states that would sometimes last for days. Sometimes these states would involve drinking, but at other times they simply came on of their own. Miss Mary Hall, whose father was for many years the Macon physician, recalls her father coming home one night after a house call and saying, "Well, Dave's going down again. He's just sitting there, not talking, just staring into space." Sid Harkreader, who would later be his partners, recalls: "There would be nights when he



wouldn't sleep at all. He'd just sit in the dark and stare. One time he told me, 'There's times I wish morning would never come.'" He was hospitalized several times for the condition; even before his mother died in 1906 she sent Bob with him to Bolivar, to the state psychiatric hospital there. And in 1913 the family sent him to the old Central Hospital near Nashville, for a stay that lasted from February 10 to May 10 -- some 13 weeks. (This started only four days after his son Eston was born.) It is hard to say exactly what his condition was, but it sounds like what a modern therapist might call manic depression. Whatever it was, it seems to have been a deeply rooted condition that had been with him long before he began performing in public.

By the end of World War I, about 1918, The Macon Midway Mule and Transportation Company was facing a new challenge. Competing lines were starting up, using the new-fangled gasoline powered trucks to carry freight. Friends urged Macon to do the same, but he wouldn't hear of it; he had always been suspicious of automobiles, and had never even learned to drive one. (To the end of his life, he refused to drive one, though he got to where he saw the need to travel in them.) It was about this time that he also wrote a song, "From Earth to Heaven," about his freight line. The chorus ran:

Been wagonning for over twenty years,  
And a-living on the farm,





I'll bet a hundred dollars to a half a ginger cake,  
I'll be here when the trucks is gone.

The last two stanzas compared the truck system to the mules:

An auto truck has a guiding wheel,  
While I hold my line,  
Oh, when my feet and body get cold,  
I'm a-walking half the time.  
I speak right to my power,  
They understand my talk.  
And when I holler, 'Way, get a-right!'  
They know just how to walk.

Says an auto truck runs quick and fast,  
The wagon hasn't the speed,  
Four good mules and a Mitchell wagon,  
Is the safest, oh yes indeed.  
I'm on my way to Heaven,  
Well, gonna tell you just how I feel,  
I'd rather ride in a wagon and go to Heaven,  
Than to hell in an automobile.

But the writing was on the wall, and it was only a matter of time before the gasoline trucks took over, and the mule power was a thing reserved only for parades and special occasions. And while Uncle Dave was comfortably fixed on his farm, he was



fifty years old, and he was used to working and being in the public eye. Most of his boys were still at home, and with farm prices what they were in the 1920's, he began casting about. As his son Eston later explained it, "You know the old saying, When life gives you a lemon, make lemonade. That's what my father did. When his freight line was put out of business, he turned to music."

In the summer of 1920, shortly after he quit his freight line, Macon visited a nephew in the Arkansas Ozarks. In a letter he wrote in 1933, he admitted that it was here, for the first time, that he "gave himself almost entirely to his favorite past time, that of playing and singing on his banjo." He was staying at a hotel, and the other tourists there totally enjoyed the informal playing he did. One man in particular impressed him; he came to him and said, "Uncle Dave, you have saved my life. I was so blue and down and out I did not care to life [sic] any longer. But by seeing you at your age act out as well as playing and singing...my spirits just rose and refreshed my whole soul and body and has given me hope to go on with life's duties." For someone who knew first hand what it was like to be "blue and down and out," this was an impressive testimony. It was also food for thought -- music might not only be profitable, but also therapeutic.



## III

During the early 1920's, then, Uncle Dave Macon, at an age when most men were getting ready to retire, embarked on a second career. There are a number of different stories about his "first" performance, and how it came about. Some say that he began by hiring out to local auctioneers to play for their sales and attract crowds. Others say a wealthy local farmer asked him how much he would take to play for a party; miffed at the man's arrogance and hoping to insult him, Uncle Dave named what he thought was a ridiculous price. To his surprise, the farmer accepted. Uncle Dave himself said "the first time I ever played and sang in public" was in 1921, at Morrison, Tennessee; "the Methodist Church there needed a new door. I gave a show, then passed the hat and collected the money, \$17." Another account has him playing for a Shriner's convention in Nashville, and yet another playing for a sales meeting of the popular Sterchi Brothers furniture chain. A story told by Macon's long-time partner Sid Harkreader describes Uncle Dave showing off for some of the patrons at Melton's barber shop in Nashville when an agent for the Loew's theater chain saw him and exclaimed, "I think it's the greatest thing that ever was!"

About 1923, Uncle Dave decided he needed a partner in his new endeavor. He first hoped to interest one of his boys in it; Glenn was emerging as a truly talented banjo player and guitarist, and he was in 1923 about 15 years old. Unfortunately, he was painfully shy, and could not be coaxed



into playing in public; to the end of his life, he remained a "kitchen musician" -- albeit a superb one. The oldest son, Archie, had a fine singing voice, but was establishing his own career as a blacksmith. A third son, Dorris, who would later join his father on stage, was still too young and inexperienced. Thus Uncle Dave turned to a young man from near Lebanon, Tennessee, Sid Harkreader. Sid was a tall, gangling youth who was skilled on the fiddle and guitar, and who was a capable singer. Furthermore, Sid was ambitious; though what people would eventually call country music was still in its infancy, Sid really planned on making a living at it. In order to do this, he knew he had to give the people what they wanted, and to promote himself and his music. He sensed the immense appeal of Uncle Dave Macon, and was willing to apprentice himself to the older singer. A deal was struck, part of which was that Uncle Dave would furnish the car, and Sid would drive it.

In 1923, Fiddlin' John Carson, a millhand from north Georgia, made the first Victrola record on which country music was sung. It was a hit, and within months all the major record companies were falling over themselves to find their own "hill country" musicians. By the summer of 1924, the Sterchi Brothers furniture chain, popular throughout Tennessee, had become the southern distributors for Vocalion records, one of the nation's leading companies. The chain's Knoxville manager, Gus Nennesteil, began looking around for local Tennessee performers that might be suitable for Vocalion. At a meeting at the Reed House in Chattanooga, he had heard Uncle Dave and Sid and





decided they fit the bill. He persuaded the Furniture Company to pay the expenses for Uncle Dave and Sid to travel to New York City to put some of their songs on record.

It was quite a trip. Asked to keep track of his expenses, Uncle Dave carried a little notebook and pencil and dutifully wrote down everything. When he was charged New York rates for a shave and a haircut, he wrote down: "Robbed in barber shop -- \$7.50." When he was walking down the street to the studio, carrying his banjo without even a case, he was accosted by a gang of rough and tumble East end kids. "Where you from, old man?" they said. "Tennessee," was the reply. "Lot of darn fools come from Tennessee, don't they?" another said. "Yes," said Uncle Dave, "but they don't run in packs like they do up here." On the way home, Uncle Dave found some new friends, and, having a good time with them, mistakenly got off the train in Richmond, Virginia, leaving Sid to go on to Tennessee. The next day he finally got straggled in, not quite clear just what had happened. "You know, I hope I didn't insult anybody," he said. "Don't worry, Uncle Dave," Sid said. "If it had been too bad, they would have arrested you."

They had done good work, though. On July 8, 1924, Uncle Dave had recorded his first records. The very first song he committed to wax was "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy," followed by "Hill Billie Blues." Both were among his most popular pieces; "Hill Billie Blues" was the first song to use the term "hillbilly," what was later applied for years to the entire genre of music we now call country. Others from that very first



session were his flood song, "All I Got Is Gone," a comedy song about a burglar who hides under the bed called "The Old Maid's Last Hope," and an imitation song called "The Fox Chase." For the next three days, Uncle Dave and Sid continued to play and sing, eventually running up a total of fourteen sides. The first song to actually be released by the company was another of the Macon favorites: "Chewing Gum."

Thus, about 1920, the year Uncle Dave turned fifty, things began to change. Trucks came on the scene, and a rival company began to use them to take away much of the Macon freight hauling business. He began to think about a trip he had made to Arkansas in 1920, where he had entertained almost constantly with his banjo, and about how well his listeners had responded. Then one day at Melton's Barber Shop in Nashville, he was showing off and dancing around his banjo when he attracted the attention of a talent buyer for the Loew's Theater chain. "I've never seen anything like that," the buyer said. "You'll be a sensation on stage."

He was. In January 1925 the Loews people sent him to Birmingham for his debut. With him were two local boys, Sid Harkreader (a fiddler and guitarist) and Dancing Bob Bradford (a tap dancer and old-time flat foot buck dancer). "Uncle Dave Macon and his sons, Direct from Billy Goat Hill" read the marquee. Uncle Dave was pulled on stage riding on a wagon pulled by a goat, wearing a big straw hat, playing a little







open-back banjo. What followed must have resembled a cross between Hee Haw and The Beverly Hillbillies; there were jokes, dancing, rube stories, and songs like "Bully of the Town" and "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy" and one Macon had just written called "Hill Billie Blues." The good citizens of Birmingham couldn't get enough; a two week run turned into three weeks, then four, then five. So many customers tried to get in that the manager let people stand up against the back wall of the theater and was arrested by the Fire Marshall for overcrowding. By the time Uncle Dave moved on to similar runs in Memphis and Nashville, he was the sensation of the season. Soon he was on the larger Loews' circuit, doing shows in Boston, Florida, and points in between.

Thus by the time George D. Hay decided to start a WSM Barn Dance in December 1925, Uncle Dave was by far the best-known entertainer in the area. He was the only one of Hay's crop of early Opry musicians who had really had any professional experience; it was not surprising that when Hay made the formal announcement about starting what would be the first scheduled Opry show, on December 28, 1925, the two featured stars were old-time fiddler Uncle Jimmy Thompson and Uncle Dave Macon. Ironically, during these early years (from 1925 to 1929), Macon was not on the show all that much; much of the time he was on tour or off making records. He soon found he could make more money by doing his own booking and setting up a series of "schoolhouse" shows around the South; he would choose a country





school, do a deal with the principal to split the proceeds, put up window cards, do a free show at recess for the kids so they would run home and tell their folks. The results worked, and even after the Opry started its own booking agency and began to put Uncle Dave on package tours, he still continued his own personal booking.

Through the 1920's and 1930's Uncle Dave continued to record, for just about every major label. Often his partners were Sam and Kirk McGee, ace instrumentalists and singers from nearby Franklin. For one session he organized a group called The Dixie Sacred Singers, and recorded early hit versions of "Maple on the Hill" and "Heavenly Sunlight." Starting in 1935, he began working with The Delmore Brothers, the definitive country harmony team, and recorded with them several wonderful sides for RCA's Bluebird label: "Over the Mountain," "One More River to Cross," "From Jerusalem to Jericho." Toward the end, his favorite partner in the studio was Smoky Mountain Glenn Stagner, when whom he recorded "Wait Til the Clouds Roll By." Though he often appeared (after 1930) with his son Dorris on tours and on the Opry, he never made any issued commercial records with his son. There were no Top Ten charts in those early days, but Uncle Dave's big hits included "Way Down the Old Plank Road" (1926), "The Death of John Henry" (1926), "Rockabout My Saro Jane" (1927), "Sail Away, Ladies" (1927), "Buddy Won't You Roll Down the Line" (1928), and the story of his own career, "From Earth to Heaven" (1928). Two of his best-remembered songs



from the radio were "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be" (his unofficial theme song) and "Eleven Cent Cotton, Forty Cent Meat" (one of his numerous protest songs).

The young Turks on the Opry usually got assigned to Uncle Dave on tours; Judge Hay felt Uncle Dave could draw the crowds, and that he could teach the youngsters about showmanship. Those who learned included The Delmore Brothers, a young Roy Acuff, a younger Minnie Pearl, a youthful Bill Monroe, and the colorful Curly Fox. In 1940, it was Uncle Dave and Roy Acuff who were the stars of the Opry's first foray into Hollywood, the Republic film **Grand Ole Opry** -- though Uncle Dave's name was listed above Acuff's in the credits. In 1939, when the Prince Albert portion of the Opry went on the NBC network for nationwide hearing, Uncle Dave became a regular member of that half hour. In 1946, when the BBC came over to record country music to introduce the Opry to England, Uncle Dave was one of the first choices. And in 1950, when Governor Gordon Browning came on-stage for a special edition celebrating the Opry's 25th anniversary, Uncle Dave was on hand to sing "Chewing Gum." By now he was being recognized as one of the founders of the Opry, and one of its most important links with its past.

Still, for a man of his age, Uncle Dave took to change amazingly well. As early as 1933 he told Judge Hay that he was looking forward to being on television -- and got his wish shortly after WSM's television station went on the air in 1950. He enjoyed the revolutionary banjo playing of bluegrass great



Earl Scruggs in the late 1940's -- though he once came to him and said, "Ernest [for some reason he always called Scruggs Ernest], you're a fine banjo player, but you ain't a bit funny." He took as his protégé a long, lean droll-faced young Opry member named David "Stringbean" Akeman, teaching him his style and his songs and eventually willing him one of his own banjos. (Stringbean did preserve the tradition, eventually carrying the music to the Opry and to **Hee Haw** before his own tragic murder.) Once Uncle Dave came up to Earl Scruggs and Stringbean and said, "Boys, we're the only three banjo players on the Opry now. We can really make ourselves some money if we were to go on tour together, and form the world's first Banjo Trio." Scruggs and Stringbean just stared at him.

By now Uncle Dave was nearing 80, and was slowing down on some of his own banjo playing. Most of the time he preferred to use frailing or clawhammer techniques, and many current Opry members who recall Uncle Dave in person recall him using only this rather simplified picking style. But in his earlier days, as reflected on his records from the 1920's, Uncle Dave was a veritable Tyrannosaurus of the banjo. Scholars have identified no fewer than sixteen different banjo styles on his records: two finger style, three finger style, complex rolls, classical styles from the 19th century, ragtime styles, blues, styles that sound amazingly like modern bluegrass, double-drop thumb, combinations of up-picking and down-picking, and several that haven't even been identified yet. We have no records of him at



his true prime, in his 30's or 40's, and can only wonder what his skill level might have been then.

By the mid-1940's, Uncle Dave was pretty much alone in the world. Matilda had passed in 1938, and all the sons were grown and most had families of their own. Though he had a housekeeper for his place in Kittrell, he lived a good deal of the time in the old Merchant's Hotel in downtown Nashville, just doors away from where the old Broadway House had been. In his last years, he gave up running his own shows, and often toured with other artists. In 1947, he wrote to a friend: "Now I am still around here, all OK, coming 77 years of age and cannot decide at present what is best for me to do. I have no woman housekeeper and no house is anyways half kept without a darling woman to boss it. I sometimes think I will talk some secondhand love to a rich widow I know for a housekeeper and hang my old banjo on the wall Saturday night."

He never did, though, and was still playing on the Grant Old Opry when his final illness struck him on March 1, 1952. After the curtain at the old Ryman came down, he sat still in his old ladder back chair he performed in, and said quietly, "Boys, you'll have to carry me off." A throat ailment caused an emergency operation, and he spent the next three weeks in Rutherford Hospital. Cards and letters poured in at the rate of 150 a day, but he finally died at 6:25 in the morning on March 22. His funeral, held at the Methodist Church, attracted over 5,000 mourners.





The day of the funeral, like everything else about Uncle Dave Macon, entered into local legend. Nobody had ever seen a procession like the one that wound its way out Main Street to the Coleman Cemetery, on the Woodbury Pike. The great and near-great were here -- as well as local farmers and shopkeepers. Car full and car full rolled past, and the yarns about Uncle Dave came and thick and fast, as everybody told their favorite Uncle Dave story. And it was said that the onlookers, standing on the Main Street curb with their hats off, were puzzled at the sight. Car after car, going to a funeral, but full of people laughing and smiling and looking for the life of them like they were having a good time.



\*\*\*

## Acknowledgments

This essay is based on material I have been gathering for the past 20 years for a book about Uncle Dave Macon. My primary sources include members of the Macon family: Uncle Dave's sons Archie, Harry, Eston, and Dorris; Edna and Ramsey Macon, for their work in the Macon genealogy; John and Wren Doubler; John Doubler and Dave Macon. I am grateful too for the many musicians who performed with Uncle Dave and shared their memories with me: Sid Harkreader, Sam and Kirk McGee, Alcyone Bate Beasley, Smoky Mountain Glen Stagner, Jewell Haynes, Curly Fox, Bill Monroe, Blythe Poteet, Louis M. Grandpa Jones, Earl Scruggs, Walter Bailes, Zeke Clements, and others. Other sources include Mrs. Ruth Woods, Miss Mary Hall, Representative John Bragg, Emily and George Boswell, Bill Knowlton, Bill Harrison, Howdy Forrester, Roy Acuff, and Paul Ritscher. I owe special thanks to the Warren County historian James Dillon for his research into the career of Captain John Macon, and to Susan Newby and Marla Cartwright for their newspaper research into the early years. The list of recordings was based on research by Ralph Rinzler, Bob Pinson, Tony Russell, and Norm Cohen. A more detailed discography may be found in the pamphlet "Uncle Dave Macon: A Bio-Discography," published (not now out of print) by the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 1970.

CKW



## UNCLE DAVE MACON --THE RECORDINGS

July 1924. New York. Vocalion Record Company.

Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy  
 Hill Billie Blues  
 Old Maid's Last Hope (A Burglar Song)  
 All I've Got's Gone  
 The Fox Chase  
 Papa's Billy Goat  
 The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 (She Was Always) Chewing Gum  
 Jonah and the Whale (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 I'm Going Away to Leave You Love  
 Love Somebody (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Soldier's Joy (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Bile Them Cabbage Down  
 Down by the River

-----  
 April 1925. New York City. Vocalion Record Company.

Run, Nigger, Run  
 Old Dan Tucker  
 Station Will Be Changed After a While  
 Rooster Crow Medley  
 Going Across the Sea  
 Just From Tennessee  
 Watermelon Smilin' on the Vine  
 All-Go-Hungry Hash House  
 From Jerusalem to Jericho  
 I Tickled Nancy  
 Arkansas Travellers (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 The Girl I Left Behind Me (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Muskrat Medley  
 Old Ship of Zion (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Down in Arkansas (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Down by the Old Mill Stream (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 I Don't Reckon It'll Happen Again  
 Save My Mother's Picture from the Sale

-----  
 April 1926. New York City. Vocalion Record Company

Rise When the Rooster Crows (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Way Down the Old Plank Road (w/ Sam McGee)  
 The Bible's True (w/ Sam McGee)  
 He Won the Heart of My Sarah Jane (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Late Last Night When My Willie Came Home (w/ Sam McGee)  
 I've Got the Mourning Blues (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Death of John Henry (Steel Driving Man) (w/ Sam McGee)  
 On the Dixie Bee Line (In That Henry Ford of Mine) (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Whoop 'em Up Cindy (w/ Sam McGee)



Only as Far as the Gate, Dear Ma (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Just Tell Them That You Saw Me (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Poor Sinners, Fare You Well (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Old Ties (w/ Sam McGee)

-----  
 September 1926. New York City. Vocalion Record Company.

We Are Up Against It Now  
 Uncle Dave's Beloved Solo  
 The Old Man's Drunk Again  
 I Ain't Got Long to Stay  
 Ain't It a Shame to Keep Your Honey Out in the Rain  
 Stop That Knocking At My Door  
 Sassy Sam  
 Shout, Mourner, You Shall Be Free  
 I Don't Care If I Never Wake Up  
 In the Good Old Summer Time  
 Something's Always Sure to Tickle Me  
 Sourwood Mountain Medley  
 Deliverance Will Come  
 Wouldn't Give Me Sugar in My Coffee

Kissin' on the Sly  
 Hold On to the Sleigh  
 In the Good Days of Long Ago  
 My Girl's a High Born Lady  
 The Cross-Eyed Butcher and the Cacklin' Hen  
 In the Old Carolina State (Where the Sweet Magnolias Bloom)  
 Never Make Love No More  
 Arcade Blues  
 Them Two Gals of Mine  
 Diamond in the Rough  
 Tossing the Baby So High  
 Shoo' Fly, Don't Bother Me  
 Uncle Ned  
 Braying Mule

-----  
 May 1927. New York City. Vocalion Record Company.

(FJD = Fruit Jar Drinkers, a band composed of Sam and Kirk  
 McGee, Mazy Todd on fiddle, and Uncle Dave Macon.)  
 (DSS = Dixie Sacred Singers, with same personnel.)

Bake That Chicken Pie (w/ FJD)  
 Rockabout My Saro Jane (w/ FJD)  
 Tell Her to Come Back Home (w/ FJD)  
 Hold That Woodpile Down (w/ FJD)  
 Carve That Possum (w/ FJD)  
 Hop High, Ladies, The Cake's All Dough (w/ FJD)  
 Sail Away, Ladies (w/ FJD)  
 I'm a Goin' Away in the Morn (w/ FJD)  
 Sleepy Lou (w/ FJD)  
 The Gray Cat on a Tennessee Farm (w/ FJD)  
 Walk, Tom Wilson, Walk (w/ FJD)





I'se Gwine Back to Dixie (w/ FJD)  
 Take Me Home, Poor Julia (w/ FJD)  
 Go Along Mule (w/ FJD)  
 Tom and Jerry (w/ FJD)  
 Rabbit in the Pea Patch (w/ FJD)  
 Jordan is a Hard Road to Travel (w/ FJD)  
 Pickaninny Lullaby Song (w/ FJD)

Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb (DSS)  
 The Maple on the Hill (DSS)  
 Poor Old Dad (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 Walking in the Sunlight (DSS)  
 Bear Me Away on Your Snowy Wings (DSS)  
 The Mockingbird Song Medley  
 Shall We Gather at the River (DSS)  
 When the Roll is Called Up Yonder (DSS)  
 In the Sweet Bye and Bye (DSS)

In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree  
 Molly Married a Travelling Man  
 When Reubin Comes to Town  
 Got No Silver Nor Gold Blues  
 Heartaching Blues  
 Roe Rire Poor Gal  
 You've Been a Friend to Me (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 Backwater Blues (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 More Like Your Dad Every Day  
 I'll Never Go There Anymore (The Bowery)

-----  
 June 1928. Indianapolis. Brunswick Recording Company.

Jesus, Lover of My Soul

-----  
 July 1928. Chicago, Illinois. Brunswick Record Co.  
 (uncredited acc. by Sam McGee, guitar or banjo-guitar)  
 From Earth to Heaven  
 The Coon that Had the Razor  
 Buddy, Won't You Roll Down the Line  
 Worthy of Estimation  
 I'm the Child to Fight  
 Over the Road I'm Bound to Go  
 The New Ford Car  
 The Gal That Got Stuck on Everything She Said  
 Comin' Round the Mountain  
 Governor Al Smith [for President]

-----  
 June 1929. Chicago, Illinois. Brunswick Recording Co.

Darling Zelma Lee (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Put Me in My Little Bed (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 The Life and Death of Jesse James (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Man That Rode the Mule Around the World (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Tennessee Jubilee (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 New Coon in Town (w/ Sid Harkreader)



For Goodness Sakes Don't Say I Told You (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 We Need a Change in the Business All Around (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Susie Lee  
 Mister Johnson (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Farm Relief  
 Uncle Dave's Travels, Part 3 (In and Around Nashville)  
 Since Baby's Learned to Talk  
 Uncle Dave's Travels, Part 4 (Visit at the Old Maid's)  
 Over the Mountain (w/ Sid Harkreader)  
 Hush Little Baby Don't You Cry  
 Uncle Dave's Travels, Part I (Misery in Arkansas)  
 Uncle Dave's Travels, Part II (Around Louisville)

-----

December 1930. Jackson, Mississippi. Okeh Phonograph Co.  
 (Uncredited accompaniment by Sam McGee, banjo-guitar and banjo)

Tennessee Red Fox Chase  
 Wreck of the Tennessee Gravy Train  
 Oh Babe, You Done Me Wrong  
 She's Got the Money Too  
 Oh Lovin' Babe  
 Mysteries of the World  
 Come on Buddy, Don't You Want to Go  
 Go On, Nora Lee

-----

August 1934. Richmond, Indiana. Starr Piano Co. (Gennett Records)

Thank God for Everything (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 When the Train Comes Along (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 The Tennessee Tornado (w/ Sam McGee)  
 Don't Get Weary Children (w/ The McGee Brothers)  
 He's Up with the Angels Now (w/ The McGee Brothers)

-----

January 1935. New Orleans, LA. Victor (Bluebird) records.  
 (Uncredited acc. by Delmore Brothers on first four sides.)

Over the Mountain  
 When the Harvest Days Are Over  
 One More River to Cross  
 Just One Way to the Pearly Gates  
 I'll Tickle Nancy  
 I'll Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy

-----

August 1937. Charlotte, North Carolina. Victor (Bluebird) records.

All in Down and Out Blues  
 Honest Confession Is Good for the Soul  
 Fame Apart From God's Approval  
 The Bum Hotel  
 From Jerusalem to Jericho  
 Two-In-One Chewing Gum  
 Travelin' Down the Road



-----  
January 1938. Charlotte, North Carolina. Victor (Bluebird) records.

(Uncredited acc. by Smoky Mountain Glen Stagner.)

Country Ham and Red Gravy  
Summertime on the Beeno Line  
He Won the Heart of Sarah Jane  
Peek-a-Boo  
Working for My Lord  
She's Got the Money Too  
Wait Til the Clouds Roll By  
Things I Don't Like to See  
They're After Me  
My Daughter Wished to Marry  
Beautiful Love

(No accompaniment on following sides, except for an unidentified fiddler on "Johnny Grey.")

Give Me Back My Five Dollars  
Railroadin' and Gamblin'  
Cumberland Mountain Deer Race  
Johnny Grey  
The Gayest Old Dude That's Out

-----  
February 1945. Nashville, Tennessee. Private recordings.  
(Accompanied by Dorris Macon.)

Come Dearest the Daylight Is Dawning/Nobody's Darling  
Don't You Look for Trouble  
I'm Free, I've Broken the Chains  
Laugh Your Blues Away  
Travellin' on My Mind  
I'm Drifting Farther from You

-----  
May 1950. Kittrell, Tennessee. Field recordings by Charles Faulkner Bryan and George W. Boswell.

Cumberland Mountain Deer Race  
Rabbit in the Pea Patch  
Bully of the Town  
Mountain Dew  
Old Maid's Love Song  
Rock of Ages  
Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy  
Death of John Henry  
That's Where My Money Goes  
Long John Green  
The Lady in the Car  
Cotton-Eyed Joe  
Something's Sure to Tickle Me  
Chewing Gum  
All in Down and Out Blues



Hungry Hash House  
Whoa Mule  
No One to Welcome Me Home  
Unidentified Banjo Solo  
Polly Put the Kettle On  
Kissing on the Sly

---







